Mobile marketing: an intimate conversation

Nancy Proctor analyses some of the strengths and weaknesses of three popular mobile marketing platforms[1]

Audiences are talking about your organisation using a range of social media, but perhaps their most intimate contact with your brand happens through their personal mobile devices.[2] Calendar, address book, photo album, camera, media player and even wallet, our mobile phones have become 'an extension of ourselves'[3] and, as Jonathan Finkelstein has remarked, mobile audio is akin to 'letting someone whisper in our ear'.[4] How can arts organisations engage the unique proximity that mobile devices afford to our community members, both ethically and effectively, in our marketing efforts?

Fundamentally, the challenges of mobile marketing are the same as that of any other marketing project: creating connections between the 'target audience' and the organisation's mission and ability to deliver.[5]

Know thyself
1. What is your institution's mission?
2. What is the key message, tied to this mission, that you want to communicate? (If the message/project does not support your institution's mission, it should be abandoned.)
3. What resources – people, time, money, support – can the organisation put at the disposal of this project?[6]

Know thy interlocutors[7]
1. Who are you trying to reach and also hear from or even collaborate with?
2. What do they need or want? How is your mission/message critical for them?[8]
3. Where are they, both in the 'real' and virtual worlds, and how do they communicate when there? What tools and platforms, including mobile, do they favour; how and when do they use them?

The answers to these questions will also have revealed that:

1 Mobile cannot be thought of in isolation from any other platform the arts organisation uses and an effective campaign links and leverages the strengths of analogue, digital and mobile platforms.[9]
2 Not all platforms will be appropriate for all projects. Choose the ones that will best carry your message to your constituents and work with those.[10]
3 And 'remember: 80% is strategy, only 20% is technology ... success is dependent on understanding customers, defining an objective, and assembling the right strategy'.[11]

Nonetheless, the specific contexts, strengths and weaknesses of mobile technologies are relevant: mobile web is not just a scaled-down version of the organisation's website.[12] Short, catchy headlines from advertisements won't necessarily work as 'tweets': transported from the one-to-many broadcast model into the many-to-many social media model, they can seem bombastic or just plain dull, and are probably aimed at different audiences from those who use mobile platforms. By the same token, what reads well as a tweet may seem cryptic as an update of your organisation's Facebook status, so use automatic feeds between social media platforms with care.

Here are some other quirks and proclivities of three popular mobile marketing platforms:

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Podcasts. Although relatively new as a medium, podcasts generally have more in common with the old one-to-many broadcast model than with social media, and as with most broadcast media, download stats alone don't reveal how much of your podcast message has been heard, if any. But as a 'push' medium (users can subscribe and automatically receive updated content), podcasts are a great way to combine promotion with interpretive content and reinforce the organisation's brand.[13] When you have a message suited to mobile audio(-visual), find out who of the organisation's constituency and target audiences listen to podcasts, where, when and how – through a mobile media player (audio or audiovisual?) or on their computer? – and build your programming for them.

SMS. Some organisations are really exploiting the strengths of the mobile phone as a two-way communication device by offering coupons, reminders and subscriptions services via text message.[14] The Smithsonian American Art Museum's audio tour pilot, opening in autumn 2009, will allow mobile users to get membership information and 'save' artworks of interest as SMS messages with links to further details on the museum's website.[15] And new 'mobile giving' services allow supporters to make small donations to organisations through their phone bills,[16] while others are pioneering the concept of micro volunteering through web-enabled phones.[17]

Twitter. Twitter spans both mobile and fixed web.[18] Like a cocktail party for shy people, you can engage 'tweeps'

singly and in groups, but they can also talk to each other, and there are at least as many conversations going on as people in the room. Start by listening in to (following) organisations similar to yours and their followers. Tools like TwitterAnalyzer.com will help you discover what your target audiences are talking about and time your messages (tweets) for the time of day they're most likely to be on Twitter. The 'shelf life' of a tweet is about the length of a good party, and if your contributions are keyed to the shared interests of those participating, they will 'follow you back'. Hashtagged keywords in your messages can help people with similar interests find you in the Twitterverse. Some may invite their friends to listen in. The popular folks at the party can be particularly effective in spreading

your message; you may want to enlist them directly (@ or direct message) to help get your message out (retweet). If you are offensive or, more likely, boring, still others will drop out of the conversation and miss what you say now and in future (unfollowing).

We live in an age of abundance when it comes to brilliant, energetic and generous people using social media and mobile platforms in the arts, so additional advice won't be hard to find.[19] Among the best tips I've found are:

1 Be a personal user of social networks such as Twitter, Linkedin or Facebook before entering your museum. Experiment, contribute.
2 Research what other organisations are doing in different platforms.
3 Explain the project to the rest of the staff, be prepared for some resistance, be motivating, be patient. And most importantly: 'start small, start right away'.[20] It takes time to build both audience and expertise on mobile platforms, but demand for mobile content and experiences

is exploding.[21] Few are better placed than arts organisations, as trusted and creative social partners, to respond to this call. ●

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1. All internet sources cited below were consulted on 12 July 2009.
2. **Sebastian Chan and Angelina Russo**, *Planning for Social Media* workshop at Museums and the Web 2009, www.archimuse.com/mw2009/abstracts/prg_335002068.html
3. **Roxanna Samii**, *Mobile Phones: The Silver Bullet to Bridge the Digital Divide?* http://rsamii.blogspot.com/2009_03_01_archive.html
4. **Jonathan Finkelstein**, interviewed with Len Steinbach by Nancy Proctor, 2 January 2009; forthcoming podcast at http://museummobile.info/archives/category/podcasts
5. **Nina Simon**'s *How to Develop a (Small-Scale) Social Media Plan* informed my list above: http://museumtwo.blogspot.com/2009/06/how-to-develop-small-scale-social-media.html
6. And are these resources sustainable for the life of the project? See the *Sustainability Checklist* in the slides from **Seb Chen and Angelina Russo**'s workshop at Museums and the Web 2009 (op cit.).
7. In the old broadcast model 'audiences' passively receive or 'hear' one-way communications. When audiences are engaged in a conversation, they become affiliates, members, constituents, collaborators and contributors.
8. **John Durel** urges arts organisations to define a mission that is of critical importance to its constituencies: 1 July

2009 webinar, *Strategic Thinking and Planning in Today's Economic Climate*, http://iweb.aam-us.org/LogIn/login.aspx?ReturnUrl=%2fCommunities%2fforum.aspx%3fforumid%3d35&forumid=35. See also 2007 article, *A Golden Age for Historic Properties* with Anita Nowery Durel, http://docs.google.com/gview?a=v&q=cache:sTDLL53bI5wJ:www.qm2.org/Golden_Age.pdf+john+durel+historic+house&hl=en&gl=us
9. See, for example, the social media policy for Headset Bros. in **Sharlyn Lauby**, *5 Steps for Successful Social Media Damage Control* in Mashable.com, http://mashable.com/2009/07/09/social-media-damage-control
10. **Simon**, op cit.
11. **Jeremiah Owyang**, *Report: Companies Should Organize for Social Media in a "Hub and Spoke" Model*, http://www.web-strategist.com/blog/2009/06/25/report-companies-should-organize-for-social-media-in-hub-and-spoke/
12. And the failure to recognise the specificity of the mobile platform and experience in the interpretive sphere was the ruination of many a multimedia tour early in this century.
13. One of my favourite examples is SFMOMA's Artcast podcast series: http://www.sfmoma.org/pages/audios
14. See, for example, projects by Guide by Cell in the US (www.guidebycell.com/gbc) and X-on in the UK (www.x-on.co.uk/products_mobile_audio_guide.htm).

15. See also http://wiki.museummobile.info/museums-to-go/projects/american-art
16. See www.mobilegiving.org
17. See The Extraordinaries, http://beextra.org and http://wiki.museummobile.info/wikiref/mobile-fundraising-volunteering
18. There are many excellent Twitter primers on the web, such as www.youtube.com/watch?v=ddO9idmax0o
19. The best starting point is *Social Media for Non-Profits: 26 Great Slideshare Presentations You Can Use*, a guest post by Rebecca Leaman on Beth's Blog: How Nonprofits Can Use Social Media, 1 July 2009, http://beth.typepad.com/beths_blog/2009/07/guest-post-by-rebecca-leaman-social-media-for-nonprofits-26-great-slideshare-presentations-you-can-u.html. On all things mobile see http://MuseumMobile.info and http://tatehandheldconference.pbworks.com/
20. Comment by **Conxa Rodà**, **@innova2, to Jasper Visser**, *Practical Advice on Developing your Presence on Social Media Websites*, 15 June 2009, http://themuseumofthefuture.com/2009/06/15/practical-advice-on-developing-your-presence-on-social-media-websites/
21. **Labellec**, *E-learning in the Mobile World and the Right Business Model to Deliver It*, 9 June 2009, http://blogs.oregonstate.edu/instructionaldesign/2009/06/09/e-learning-in-the-mobile-world-and-the-right-business-model-to-deliver-it/